

VZCZCXR07795
PP RUEHQU
DE RUEHPU #1996/01 3551247
ZNR UUUUU ZZH

P 211247Z DEC 07

FM AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7397
INFO RUEHZH/HAITI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 1731
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA PRIORITY 1545
RUEHQU/AMCONSUL QUEBEC PRIORITY 0968
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1381

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 001996

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WHA/EX PLEASE PASS USOAS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM HA

SUBJECT: JACQUES BERNARD APPOINTED ELECTORAL COUNCIL
DIRECTOR GENERAL (AGAIN)

REF: A. PORT AU PRINCE 1959
1B. 06 PORT AU PRINCE 2374

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¶1. (U) This message is sensitive but unclassified -- please protect accordingly.

¶2. (SBU) Summary: In an important step forward for Haitian elections, the GOH on December 14 issued a decree naming Jacques Bernard Director General of the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP). Prime Minister Alexis presided over the official "installation" of Bernard December 19. The newly elected president of the CEP used the opportunity to speak about the need for efficient elections, reinforcement of the structure of the electoral institution, and transparent and financially sound spending. Upon stepping back into the job he filled for most of 2006, Bernard noted the urgency of a new electoral law, and claimed elections could take place 90 days after Parliament passes the law. Thus far, the rapport between Bernard and the councilors is amicable, but they must all employ their authorities cautiously to avoid conflicts that could hamper the electoral process. End summary.

¶3. (SBU) The GOH on December 14 issued a decree signed by President Preval, Prime Minister Alexis and Minister of Justice Magloire naming Jacques Bernard Director General of the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP). Prime Minister Alexis presided over the official "installation" of Bernard at CEP headquarters on December 19. The nine new councilors, as well as former CEP President Max Mathurin, attended the ceremony, along with Minister of Justice Rene Magloire, Minister of Interior Paul Antoine Bien-Aime, and several members of the Haitian Senate. (Note: Bernard served as DG from October 2005 to December 14, 2006, at which point he resigned, stating that with the completion of local and municipal elections on December 3 he had fulfilled his duties. Bernard said at the time that his discomfort with the irregular expenditures of some councilors hastened his resignation. See ref B. End note.)

¶4. (U) PM Alexis emphasized that it was Bernard's first appearance as DG that gave legitimacy to President Preval and the Parliament, and said he had no doubt Bernard would meet

Preval's expectations and "deliver the goods" this time around. Alexis reminded the nine councilors that they are responsible to the entire nation, not just the sectors that nominated them. Newly elected CEP President Frantz-Gerard Verret underscored the need for effective elections, and asked his fellow councilors to adhere to the institution's regulations and make it stronger. He also called for transparent and financially sound spending on the part of the CEP. Verret noted that their final target is the completion of the indirect elections, culminating in the installation of the permanent CEP. He then turned to Bernard and advised him that his mission as DG is to supervise the CEP staff.

¶ 15. (SBU) Bernard began his brief remarks by thanking the staff and volunteers who had made the 2006 elections possible, noting that he had not had an opportunity to do so prior to his departure. He said his primary mission was the senate elections, and repeatedly charged that this CEP must "deliver the goods." A small celebration in his office following the ceremony, Bernard told several Senators and members of the diplomatic corps that a new elections law is imperative. Senate Vice President Edmonde Supplice Beauzile urged Bernard to send the draft law to the Parliament quickly so they could begin their review. Bernard told Poloffs separately that the CEP's draft law needed only minor tweaking and would be ready for Parliament to consider in January. He had already spoken to several members of Parliament and was confident they could pass the law quickly. He stated he would be able to hold senate elections 90 days after the law's passage. Bernard noted several other pressing needs at the CEP, including rehiring the members of the communal electoral offices (BECs) dismissed by the previous CEP and compensating CEP staff who had not been paid for several months. He admitted he had not yet assessed the CEP's current financial condition.

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¶ 16. (U) The nine new councilors on December 18 voted on leadership positions within the council. Frantz-Gerard Verret received five out of nine votes for President of the CEP. Verret is the representative of the Catholic Bishops' conference and a close friend of Preval, as well as the cousin of Preval's economic advisor Gabriel Verret. The council elected Rodol Pierre, representative of "popular organizations," as Vice President; Pastor Leonel Raphael from the Protestant Federation as Secretary General; and Gaillot Dorsainvil from the handicapped sector as Treasurer.

¶ 17. (SBU) Comment: Bernard's name has been circulating for months as the likely DG, so his nomination comes as no surprise. His installation is an important step in getting the delayed electoral process moving. In light of the previous CEP's history of infighting and antagonism toward the DG, a lingering concern of the international community, the CEP councilors and Jacques Bernard himself is the ability of the new council and DG to work together harmoniously. CEP President Verret's December 19 speech, in which he carefully limited references to Bernard's authority, was perhaps an attempt to lay down a warning that the CEP councilors will not be dictated to by the DG. Bernard will need to step lightly around the councilors to avoid the clashes he had with the previous council.

TIGHE